

## Pandemic Flu Planning Status Update as of June 5, 2006

From late April to early June the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD) has been engaged in a number of planning meetings, several presentations and many scheduled activities related to preparing for a potential pandemic flu. (Earlier planning information is not repeated here, but available on the web page.)

As a public health department one of our principal roles in pandemic flu preparation and planning is to provide all citizens of Lincoln and Lancaster County with accurate and timely information about a possible pandemic flu. The facts are as follows:

- At the moment there is no pandemic flu.
- Avian influenza (bird flu) is infecting both wild and domestic birds on at least three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe).
- In relatively small numbers (227 as of May 29, 2006) individuals in close contact with birds, have contracted avian influenza. Some limited person-to-person spread among close personal contacts has been reported, but there's no easy person-to-person spread outside of family units.
- Over half of the people who have been diagnosed with the avian flu virus (H5N1) that they got from close contact with birds, have died so far.
- There's a concern by scientists that the avian influenza virus will mutate into a form that is easily transmissible from person to person, thus producing the next **pandemic (a worldwide epidemic of a new flu virus)**.
- While we can expect that there will be another pandemic in the future, no one knows when it may occur or how many people will get the disease or how sick they will be. Many people look at the effects of the "Spanish Flu" of 1918-1919 to anticipate a worse-case scenario, but no one will know how bad the next pandemic flu is until it happens.
- If a new strain of flu strikes soon, there will be no vaccine available against the pandemic virus for 6 to 9 months as current vaccine production processes take that long.
- We must prepare and plan as a community and as individuals to reduce the potential disruptions caused by a pandemic flu.

The above summarizes the facts as we know them, and one of our primary roles is to make people aware of what a "pandemic" is and the burdens it could impose on Lincoln and Lancaster County. The Health Department is certainly not alone in making people aware of pandemic flu as pandemic flu is a major topic of focus worldwide, but we are the local agency charged with preparing to address the health consequences if a pandemic strikes the community. Staff members from the LLCHD are heavily engaged in this effort, and there's much more to be done before the vast majority of our local residents know the potential challenges posed by a pandemic flu. Businesses and agencies all across the County are

also beginning to make plans and preparing for the worst, while hoping for the best. More agencies and businesses need to begin such planning.

The LLCHD is planning for a pandemic in order to prepare and thus minimize the potential adverse effects. Currently we are engaged in getting other agencies and businesses to think through how they'll continue to operate if a pandemic strikes. We are also asking individuals to take the steps they might take to lessen the effects on the community's limited resources.

When there are cases of avian flu in the bird populations in North America, which is probable later this year; or, once there are any U.S. human cases of avian flu (bird to human spread) we will ramp up our efforts to share information and make moves to lessen the spread locally. While we hope the next pandemic occurs in the distant future, the time to prepare is now.

### Recent Presentations

Requests for presentations on pandemic flu continue to come in and staff members will try to accommodate such requests or arrange for others to meet the needs. Some of the larger presentations are listed below:

On May 17<sup>th</sup> there was a pandemic flu presentation to representatives from the WorkWell companies.

On May 23<sup>rd</sup> a pandemic flu meeting was held for members of the faith community at the Holiday Inn in the Haymarket.

The first of several planned public forums was held on Saturday, June 3rd at the F Street Recreation Center, 1225 F Street. The forum was well attended. More community forums are going to be scheduled for those who missed this session.

### Pandemic Flu Committee Meetings

In addition to the presentations, meetings have been held with several of the committees we have engaged in our local pandemic flu planning. The Lincoln Public Schools (LPS) Pandemic Flu Committee met twice in May and on May 22nd the group reviewed school policies and communication pieces ("Infection Control Capsules" for both LPS families and employees). The information and material as well as an update on the committee's progress were presented to the LPS School Board at their May 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting. It is planned for the newsletters to be posted on the LPS website before fall.

Businesses need to plan for a possible pandemic and members of the business community are expected to be key partners in our efforts to minimize the potential adverse effects of a pandemic. In addition to the session with WorkWell companies, we recently met with members of the Lincoln Electric System (LES) to discuss their draft plan and we continue to ask businesses to download or print

the business checklist and begin their planning if they haven't already started. The first meetings were also held with the Airport Authority and the Nebraska Pharmacy Association. Future meetings with these groups are being planned.

On May 31<sup>st</sup> Dr. Bruce Dart, Director of the LLCHD, attended a tabletop exercise in Grand Island focused on public health agencies, both state and local, and how they will respond to a pandemic.

### Future Events

- The Mayor's Neighborhood Meeting is scheduled to discuss pandemic flu and its impact on neighborhoods on June 8<sup>th</sup>.
- The Mutual Aid Society's June 19<sup>th</sup> evening meeting will have a session on pandemic flu.
- Several sessions are scheduled in June with the Lincoln Water System to discuss pandemic flu and local planning efforts.
- There's a limited tabletop exercise planned for June 22<sup>nd</sup> to begin to see how several of the key partners are likely to respond to cases of pandemic flu in the community (this is only a drill—not a real event). This is the first of several tabletops and drills the LLCHD will be involved with over the summer.
- Meetings are being planned with representatives of the minority community, aging and follow-up meetings with business representatives and companies that may not have been reached.
- As indicated, some future community forums are being planned. While no date is firm, an evening meeting will be scheduled as a local pandemic summit involving the Lt. Governor, Rick Sheehy, and the Chief Medical Officer of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Dr. Joann Schaefer. Information about the forum will be posted once the date, time and location are determined.

For more information on these events, or other information on avian and pandemic flu, visit our web page for updates, or call (402) 441-8053.

There are several web sites that regularly follow the latest situation related to pandemic flu. For those who seek more information we recommend the official government website on pandemic flu, which is [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov). There's a link from our web page to that site.